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Bruce Hoffman

May 1984

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RECENT TRENDS IN PALESTINIAN TERRORISM*

Bruce Hoffman

THE PLO SINCE LEBANON

Compared to two years ago, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) today is a battered, if not enfeebled, entity whose operational capacity has been undermined by its two expulsions from Lebanon, internal strife and reduced funding. A number of reasons account for the PLO's stagnation: the loss of Lebanon as a central operations and political base; the dispersal of its ranks throughout the Arab world; the demise of its aspirations of becoming a conventional military power; intensified policy disputes and attendant internecine power struggles; and, new, and unaccustomed, financial difficulties.

The PLO's recent troubles ostensibly began on 3 June 1982, when members of a renegade splinter group known as "Black June" attempted to assassinate Israel's ambassador to Great Britain. The shooting set in motion a chain of events which prompted Israel to invade Lebanon on 6 June and culminated six weeks later in the PLO's evacuation from Beirut. During the months following the withdrawal, Arafat maneuvered to parlay the PLO's military defeat into a political victory. He unsuccessfully sought to steer a middle course between the so-called "moderate" faction and the radical, "rejectionist" elements within the umbrella organization. He hinted, on the one hand, of the prospect of accepting the Reagan peace plan (which called for the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip confederated with Jordan in return for PLO recognition of Israel), while warning, on the other, that, should diplomacy prove fruitless, he would "become the biggest terrorist of them all".

Arafat's endeavors ultimately foundered on his own hesitancy and uncertainty alongside of the entrenched intransigence of the PLO "rejectionists" and the insurmountable opposition of Syria. Moreover, the months of irresolution and doubt provoked dissident forces not

*This paper was presented before the "Symposium On International Terrorism" held at Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey on 17-18 April 1984.

simply within the radical camp, but within *Fatah* itself. Six months later, these disgruntled elements, with Syria's approval and encouragement, openly challenged Arafat's leadership of the PLO. In May 1983, a *Fatah* detachment stationed in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley mutinied. By the end of the month, fighting had erupted between the rebels and Arafat loyalists. In June, after accusing the Syrian government of abetting the revolt, Arafat was arrested and unceremoniously deported from Syria.

Two months later, Syria threw its full weight behind the insurrection, forcibly removing the 1,000 or so Arafat supporters still in the Bekaa. The *Fatah* loyalists eventually made their way to Arafat's only remaining stronghold in Lebanon, the Baddawi and Nahr al-Bared refugee camps on the outskirts of Tripoli. Then, on 2 November, the *Fatah* rebels and other PLO dissidents, supported by Syrian artillery, attacked the camps. In rapid succession, both camps were overwhelmed and their defenders routed. Arafat and his men withdrew to Tripoli and, in a scenario reminiscent of the Israeli siege of Beirut eighteen months before, were once again expelled from Lebanon.

Apart from this internal strife, which has severely undermined the PLO's always tenuous unity, the umbrella organization's operational capacity has also been weakened by financial problems. For years, the PLO was accustomed to receiving huge sums of money from oil-rich Arab states. Recently, the decline of world oil prices has led to a commensurate decrease in contributions to the PLO. Saudi Arabia, for example, reportedly reduced its largesse from \$300 million per year to \$50 million. Libya similarly cutback its financial support, choosing instead to parcel out selective amounts only to those PLO member-groups who reflect that country's hardline" policies. In addition, the still-unresolved Iraq-Iran war has forced Iraq to curtail drastically its contributions because of the decline of its oil production and its own burgeoning military expenditures.

It is generally believed that, in the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, there has been an appreciable decline in Palestinian terrorist activity. However, a statistical examination of data in the Rand Corporation's Chronology of International Terrorism presents a rather different and considerably less sanguine picture:

- *First*, there was little change in the *total* level of Palestinian terrorism against Israeli targets when measured over six month intervals since January 1982, although, at the same time, there was a decline of operations in Israel itself;
- *Second*, surrogate attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets outside of Israel by European and Latin American terrorist groups increased dramatically during the six months following the invasion but then plummeted in an equally dramatic fashion after December 1982;
- *Third*, although surrogate attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets have decreased, proxy operations carried out against other national targets--in particular United States' diplomatic and military personnel-- are increasing;
- *Fourth*, more attacks have been staged by Palestinian and Arab terrorists against Palestinian and Arab targets than against Israeli and Jewish targets;
- *Fifth*, in the past the locus of Palestinian terrorism has indeed been in Lebanon. However, during the first four months of 1984, there has been an alarming increase of Palestinian terrorism in both Europe and Israel.

PALESTINIAN ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAELI TARGETS

For over a decade, the PLO had used Lebanon as a base from which to attack Israel and to train and dispatch its minions to assault Israeli targets throughout the world. The principal objective of Israel's invasion of Lebanon was to destroy the PLO in Lebanon. The Israelis only partially succeeded. Clearly, the PLO was routed and defeated in terms of conventional conflict. Its huge stockpiles of weapons were indeed destroyed. The vast majority of its military bases and training camps were over-run. Also, its operational capacity was neutralized and its always tenuous unity undermined by the lightning Israeli assault. The invasion did indeed result in a significant curtailment of Palestinian terrorist operations in Israel and the Occupied Territories. This is evinced by the chart before you. According to the Rand chronology, terrorist activity in Israel declined by half during the six

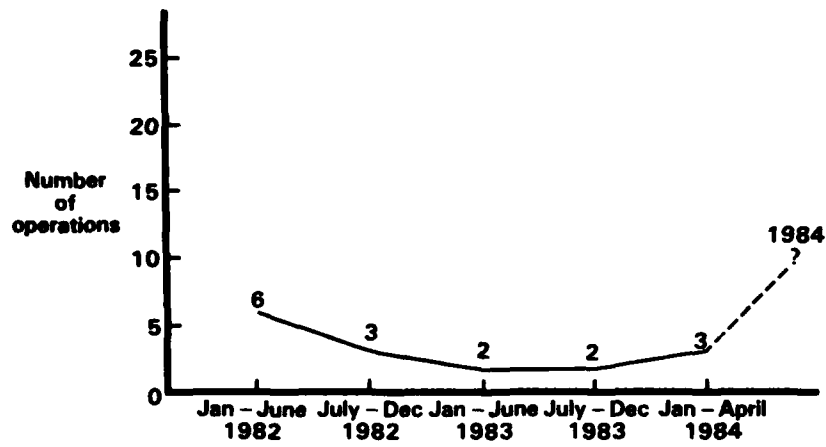


Fig. 1. -- Location of Palestinian Terrorist Operations: Israel

months following the invasion when compared to the six months preceding the invasion. It continued to decline during the first six months of 1983 and remained at the same level for the remainder of the year. But, Palestinian terrorist activity in Israel thus far in 1984, presents a less encouraging scenario.

To date, four major terrorist operations have been mounted. Three of the four attacks--the hand grenade assault allegedly perpetrated by the DFLP in downtown Jerusalem on 28 February; the machine-gun and grenade attack, claimed by the same group, only blocks from the previous attack on 2 April; and, the hijacking of a bus traveling between Tel Aviv and Asqelon on 12 April--represent an ominous change of terrorist tactics. Between January 1982 and February 1984, virtually every terrorist operation in Israel had conformed to an identical pattern of an unseen perpetrator placing a concealed bomb on a bus or at busy thoroughfares or simply hurling a grenade at a crowd or vehicle passing by: as was the case in the bombing of a bus in Ashdod on 7 March, which was claimed by Black June. This sort of anonymous assault evinced a comparative lack of operational expertise, planning or sophistication in contrast to the more "open" attacks which have occurred twice in Jerusalem, when brazen terrorists stood their ground and boldly turned their weapons upon the persons in front of them, and on the ill-fated Tel Aviv to Asqelon bus as well.

The fact that, in the first four months of 1984 there have been as many terrorist operations as throughout the entirety of 1983, is disturbing enough in its own right. It becomes even more disquieting when viewed against the backdrop of the peculiar climate engendered by present-day internal Palestinian political dynamics. The decentralization of power within the PLO caused by the debacle in Lebanon during the summer of 1982, the internecine power struggle and fighting which erupted thereafter and the eclipse of Arafat and the "moderate" factions' influence these events engendered, implies that whatever central control over the PLO now exists is exercised from Damascus. The DFLP, PFLP and Black June have their headquarters in that city and, accordingly, are presumably kept on a tight leash by Syria. The present escalation of terrorism in Israel suggests that the Syrians

may be loosening their hold on the Palestinian groups enjoying their hospitality. Whether this will prove a harbinger of continued terrorist activity is unclear. However, given Syria's pretensions to make Lebanon its vassal and its alleged involvement, or tacit approval, of the shadowy Islamic Jihad's operations against American and French diplomatic and military personnel and installations in Lebanon and Kuwait, the escalation of Palestinian terrorist activity in Israel cannot be regarded as an isolated phenomenon.

One might also argue that, although the invasion of Lebanon had a salutary effect--however ephemeral--on Palestinian terrorism directed against Israeli targets in Israel itself, it had but a marginal effect on Palestinian operations against Israeli targets *outside* the country. For example, Figure 2 shows that, whereas there were only two attacks during the six months before the invasion, there were four--or double the amount--in the six months following the invasion, five between January and June 1983, four during the second half of 1983, dropping to only one thus far this year. This trend implies that, while the invasion may have disrupted Palestinian terrorism in Israel for a time, it only encouraged the Palestinians to shift their operations elsewhere: in this case, to Europe and, to a considerably lesser extent, Australia (where, in December 1983, the Israeli consulate and a Jewish club in Sydney were bombed). The decline of operations outside of Israel may be seen as further evidence of the Palestinians' intention to once again bring the struggle directly into Israel.

SURROGATE TERRORIST ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAELI AND JEWISH TARGETS IN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA

It is, perhaps, only this category which offers some encouraging news in terms of a significant decline of terrorism directed against Israeli and Jewish targets outside of Israel. As Figure 3 shows, during the six months following the invasion, there were seven times as many attacks staged by surrogate terrorists operating either at the behest of the PLO or independently in a demonstration of "revolutionary solidarity" as in the six months prior to the invasion. Since December 1983, however, there has been only one such operation. What accounts for this sudden and dramatic escalation and equally as sudden and

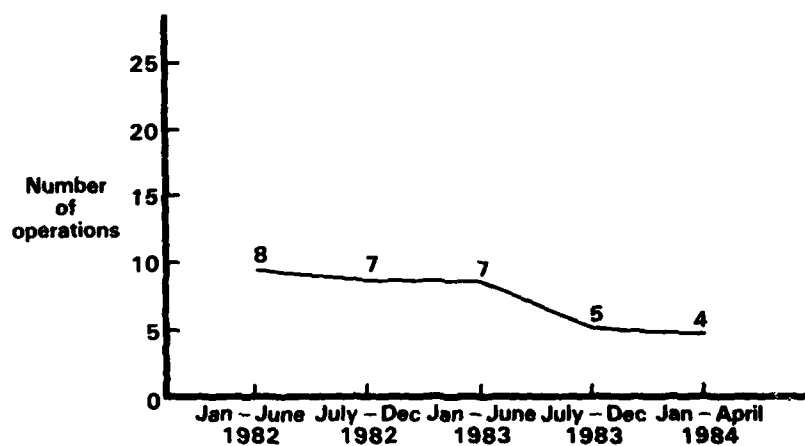


Fig. 2. -- Palestinian Terrorist Operations Against Israeli Targets

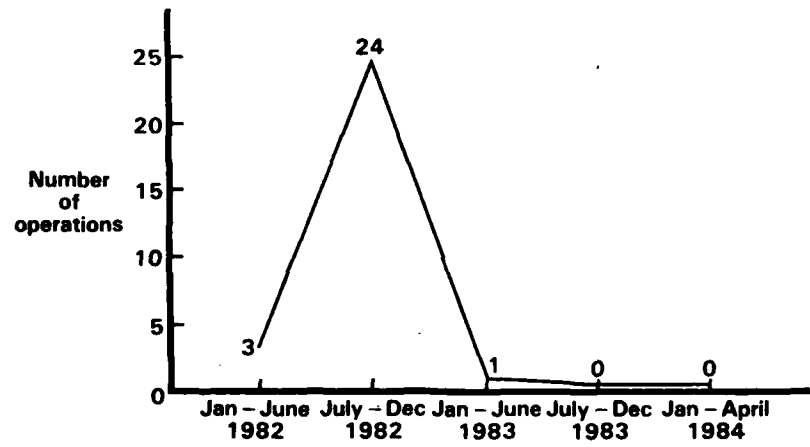


Fig. 3. -- Surrogate Terrorist Attacks Against Israeli Or Jewish Targets Outside Of The Middle East

dramatic decline?

According to Israeli estimates, some 40 different international terrorist groups--half of whom were European, while the remainder were from Latin America, Africa, and Asia--received training, weapons, intelligence and logistical support from the PLO before the Israeli invasion. In exchange, these groups complied with PLO requests to use their members on intelligence-gathering and reconnaissance missions in Israel, as couriers, as arms and explosives smugglers, and, as we have seen, in operations against Israeli and Jewish targets in their respective home countries.

In the wake of the invasion, the PLO quite naturally turned to this array of international groups and inveighed upon them to repay the debts for PLO training, weapons and intelligence supply they had incurred. This was doubtlessly the case in the second half of 1982, when France's *Action Directe* bombed a number of Israeli diplomatic offices and business concerns. LARF, the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Factions, which is believed to have close ties with *Action Directe*, claimed that it was responsible for the bombing of an Israeli diplomat's car in September. The connection between other Italian, Greek and Latin American terrorist groups undertaking operations at the behest of the PLO or on their own is less clear. For example, in July 1983, the Greek Revolutionary Popular Struggle bombed an Israeli export concern and a Jewish-owned travel agency; in September and October, the Communist Armed Group and Communist Metropolitan Front respectively claimed credit for the bombing of two Jewish community centers in Milan and Rome; in September, Colombia's M-19 stated that it was responsible for the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and ambassador's residence in Bogota; in October, several Israeli and Jewish establishments in Brazil received bomb threats from that country's Popular Revolutionary Vanguard. Additional, unclaimed, attacks against Israeli or Jewish targets were recorded in West Germany, Austria, Guatemala, Bolivia and Ecuador.

This substantial escalation of surrogate terrorist activity may be explained as the "repayment" of these groups' "debts" to the PLO or, alternatively, as an ephemeral demonstration of "revolutionary solidarity" with the Palestinians. Its subsequent decline indicates

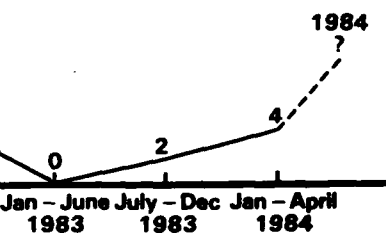
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that they were not part of any orchestrated campaign and that, with these "debts" having been "repaid," the groups no longer felt obliged to continue their anti-Israeli/anti-Jewish operations. A related aspect of this development is that the PLO's "bargaining" position has been compromised by the Israeli invasion. Without its vast arsenal, deprived of its numerous training camps and beset with financial problems of its own, the PLO quite simply has less to offer its international counterparts than it formerly had.

SURROGATE OPERATIONS AGAINST OTHER NATIONAL TARGETS

The aforementioned decrease of attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets has not been accompanied by a commensurate decrease of surrogate attacks on other nationals. As this chart depicts there was an attendant increase of operations against American targets during the six months after the invasion which were probably related to the deployment of U.S. Marines to Lebanon in August 1982 and the announcement of the Reagan peace initiative the following months. There was a decline during the two succeeding six month periods, followed by an alarming increase of attacks on American targets this year. On 15 February, Leamon Hunt, the ranking civilian official in charge of the U.S. group monitoring the Israeli-Egyptian Sinai Accord, was assassinated in Rome. Both the Red Brigades as well as LARF claimed responsibility for his murder. Just five days earlier, on 10 February, an American academician, Frank Reiger, was kidnapped in Beirut. On 7 March, Jeremy Levin, the bureau chief for the U.S.-based Cable News Network, was also abducted in Beirut; and, on 16 March, an American diplomat, William Buckley, was kidnapped in Beirut as well. Just two weeks ago, a U.S. military courier was assassinated in Greece, only a week after a British cultural attache was murdered in Athens.

The Italian and Greek incidents suggest that Palestinians may once again have turned to their terrorist brethren or else that these groups are again acting on their own in demonstrations of "revolutionary solidarity."



cks Against Other Nationals

INTERNECINE PALESTINIAN/ARAB

More terrorist attacks are committed by Palestinian and Arab brethren and brothers than are committed against Israeli targets. In 1982, there have been 50 fratricidal attacks involving Israel or Jews. The fracturing of the Israeli invasion and subsequent occupation explains this trend. For example, in the invasion, 14 internecine attacks occurred in July and August 1982, before increasing

The pattern of attacks in the West Bank involved attacks on Arab diplomats, tourist offices of Egypt and Jordan, the peace treaty with Israel and Jordan, and Jordanian affairs. There was only one operation when, on 1 March, an official belonging to the Liberation Front was assassinated. This is a deviation from this pattern: a senior Frenchman and a Palestinian community leader were assassinated. In 1983, however, the pattern, particularly within *Fatah* heralded fratricidal bloodletting. In January, a number of *Fatah Central Committee* members were killed in Baalbek. Less than a month later, a military intelligence headquarters in the Palestine Research Center there was destroyed. A known PLO moderate and Arafat's personal secretary was killed by members of Black June. In May, a PLO official was mistakenly killed and a senior PLO official was killed by unknown gunmen in Spain and an attack on a PLO official resulted in the wounding of one of his

Since that time, however, there has been a decline in internecine terrorism. Only six incidents occurred in the second half of 1983 (the most significant was the killing of a PLO official in Greece in August).

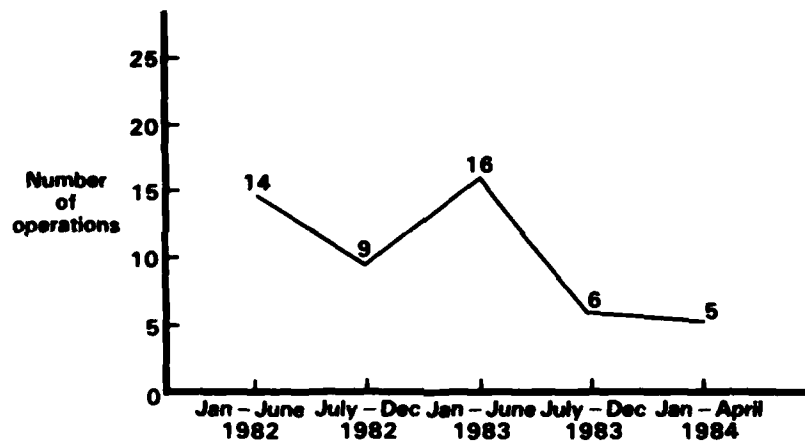


Fig. 5. -- Internecine Palestinian And/Or Arab Attacks Against Palestinian And/Or Arab Targets

thus far this year, but they have mostly been directed against Saudi and Gulf Arab targets and only on occasion against a Palestinian. One possible explanation for this might be the trend towards increased operations in Israel which is causing a commensurate decline in fratricidal bloodshed.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

In terms of regional distribution, we have already discussed the decline of Palestinian terrorism in Israel just after the invasion and until the present year and its resurgence over the past four months. The opposite holds true for Europe. At the height of the surrogate terrorist campaign during the six months following the invasion, there was a tremendous upsurge in Palestinian and Palestinian-related terrorism on that continent. Whereas there were 26 incidents between July and December 1982, only eight occurred in each of the succeeding six month time frames. The present year, however, indicates a significant escalation of activity in Europe--since eight attacks have already been committed. Once again, surrogate groups account for this high level of terrorism, suggesting that the Palestinians are again turning to others to do their bidding for them. The recrudescence of surrogate terrorism, however, has not occurred in Latin America, as it did in 1982, as there have been no new incidents to date.

CONCLUSION

The statistics cited during the preceding narrative reveal that Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 actually had little effect--and, moreover, only an ephemeral one at that--on the level of Palestinian terrorist activity. Although the invasion succeeded in securing Israel's northern border from Palestinian artillery and rocket attack or cross-border infiltration by guerrillas, undermined the PLO's political infrastructure and severely weakened Arafat's power it did not result in any significant decline of attacks on Israeli or Jewish targets. Admittedly, there was a decrease in the number of Palestinian terrorist operations in Israel following the invasion. At the same time, however, this development was accompanied by an increase of

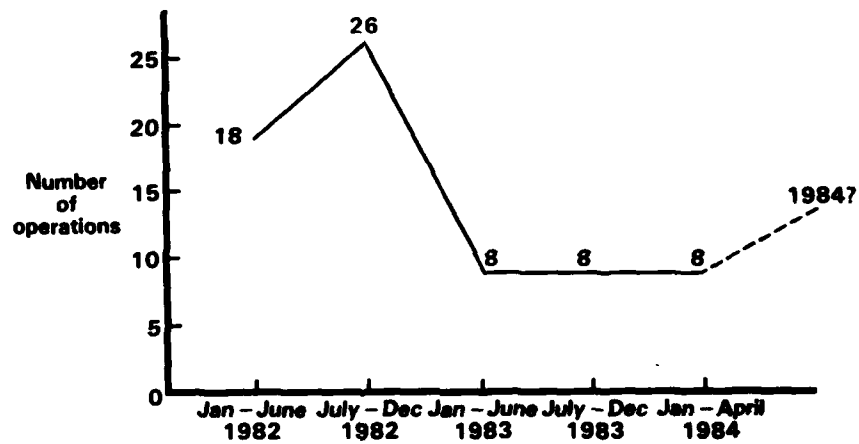


Fig. 6. -- Location of Palestinian And Surrogate Terrorist Operations:
Europe

terrorist attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets *outside* of Israel by surrogate terrorist groups operating either at the behest of the PLO or out of feelings of revolutionary fraternity. Further, the level of *Palestinian* attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets outside of Israel continued at nearly identical levels as those prior to the invasion.

In recent months there has been a dramatic escalation both in the number of Palestinian operations committed in Israel as well as in the type of incident perpetrated by the terrorists. Prior to February 1984, Palestinian terrorism was mostly restricted to bombings or hit-and-run hand grenade assaults. Since that time, however, the terrorists have demonstrated a determination and willingness to carry out wanton, near-suicide machine-gun and hand grenade attacks rather than the anonymous bombings of the past. As one observer notes, "the Israelis are discovering that wrecking the PLO and Mr. Arafat's standing does not mean the end of the Palestinian problem".¹ In the wake of these attacks, Israel will doubtlessly undertake additional means to enhance its security and thwart further attacks. But the fact remains that its war against the Palestinians did not end with the PLO's defeat in Lebanon and that the terrorists are recovering from the blow dealt to them two years ago and marshaling their resources for a new, and potentially more bloody, campaign.

APPENDIX I: THE ARMENIAN-PALESTINIAN CONNECTION

ASALA has long enjoyed a close working relationship with the PLO. In 1975, the Armenian nationals who went on to form ASALA trained under *Fatah's* auspices in Lebanon. Over time, however, ASALA drifted away from the comparatively "moderate" *Fatah* to more radical, ideologically-oriented Marxist-Leninist groups like the PFLP and PFLP-GC.² When Hapog Hagopian, the reputed leader of ASALA, was asked during an interview in 1980 about relations between his group and the PLO, he cryptically replied that, "We have relations with all revolutionary organizations all over the world". Further, evidence discovered by the Israeli Army

¹*New York Times*, 15 April 1984.

²*Le Monde*, 27 July 1983. See also, *The Middle East*, September 1983.

in abandoned Palestinian training camps in Lebanon shows that members of ASALA received instruction as guests of the PLO.³

Israel's invasion of Lebanon, however, forced ASALA, like the PLO, to flee from Lebanon. Members of the group allegedly settled in Syria, Iran, Greece, Libya and Cyprus. But even the disruption caused by the invasion failed to neutralize the group itself. *The Economist Foreign Report* maintains that in the weeks following the Israeli invasion, a modus vivendi was reached between the Palestinians and ASALA which called for greater cooperation between the two groups and the mounting of parallel terrorist operations with the Palestinians continuing to attack Israeli targets and the Armenians continuing to attack Turkish targets.⁴ Other reports, however, contradict this and state that the ASALA cell in Syria has joined forces with Black June and offers the "dramatic cooling" of relations between the PLO and ASALA which occurred in 1982 as proof. Allegedly, the PLO has now begun efforts to harm ASALA. Senior Arafat aide, Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf), reportedly furnished French security services with details of ASALA members along with their photographs.⁵

³JPRS, Interview, 1 September 1980.

⁴*Le Monde* 27 July 1983.

⁵*Foreign Report*, 19 August 1982.

⁶*The Middle East*, September 1983.

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